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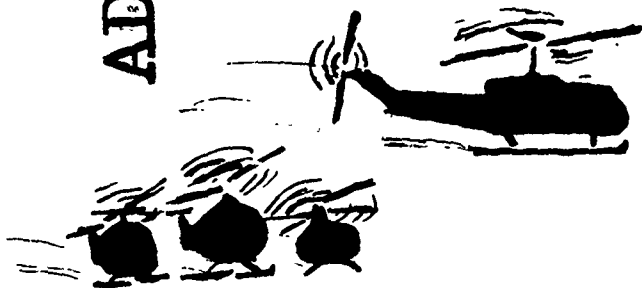
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AD 502772

OPERATIONS REPORT LESSONS LEARNED

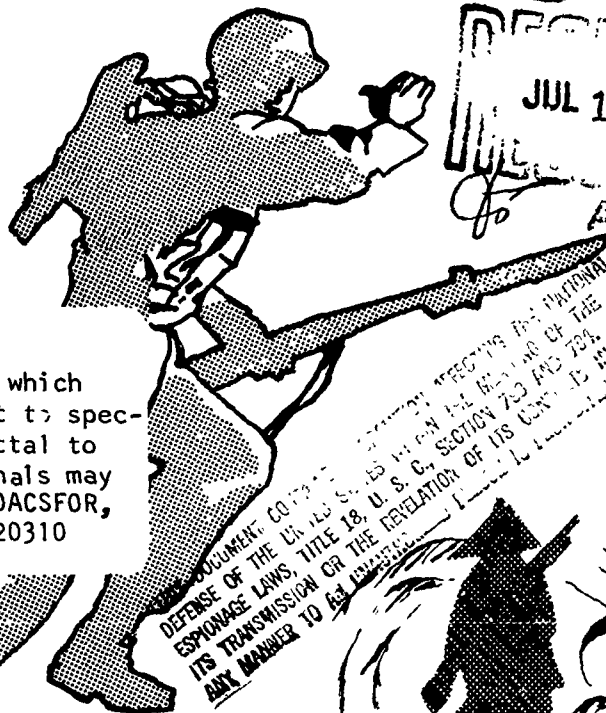
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HEADQUARTERS
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20310

IN REPLY REFER TO
AGAM-P (M) (31 Mar 66) FOR OT RD

11 1 Apr 1966

SUBJECT: Operations Report. Lessons Learned 2-66 - The Battle
of Annihilation and The BONG SON Campaign [U].

TO: SEE DISTRIBUTION

12 18p. 1

1. This is the third of a series of reports from combat operations being conducted by US Forces in Vietnam.

2. Information contained in this report is provided to ensure appropriate benefits in the future from lessons learned during current operations. Many lessons learned are being derived from operations in Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, major field exercises, and other pertinent sources. The lessons cited in this report have not been evaluated by the Department of the Army and do not reflect official doctrine or approval.

3. It is important this report be placed in the hands of those officers and enlisted men that train our individual replacements and units for RVN. These lessons learned can result in higher enemy kills, better chances of survival for our individual soldiers, and an increased combat effectiveness of our units.

4. Additional lessons learned will be forwarded as they become available. Previously published reports of this series were:

1. Summary of Lessons Learned, Vietnam (U) 2 November 1965.
2. Operations Report-Lessons Learned, Report 1-66 OPERATION CRIMP, 22 March 1966.

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY:

J. C. Lambert
J. C. LAMBERT
Major General, USA
The Adjutant General

2 Incl

1. The Battle of Annihilation
2. An account of the Bong Son Campaign

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(Continued on page 3)

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HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
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Ser No 0406
15 March 1966

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SUBJECT: Lessons Learned No 55: The Battle of Annihilation

TO: See Distribution

1. (CMHA) INTRODUCTION: This issue of Lessons Learned deals with the "battle of annihilation" as it pertains to operations in RVN and illustrates the validity of the doctrine of "Find, Fix, Fight and Finish." The emphasis in this issue is placed on the importance of rapid reaction to good intelligence and the fixing of an enemy force so that he may be effectively destroyed. Combat experience in Vietnam has shown that good intelligence of VC unit locations is difficult to obtain, placing a premium on swift reaction in order to take advantage of this information. Additionally, experience has also shown that the enemy will not generally "stand and fight" when faced by a superior force aggressively employed, preferring to "fade away into the bush" in classic guerrilla fashion. It then becomes obvious that to prevent this "fading away", in addition to aggressively attacking his force, we must fix the enemy in place by denying him routes of escape and withdrawal. This issue of Lessons Learned contains three examples of combat actions, at both large and small unit levels, two of which are considered successful and one unsuccessful, with the criteria of success being the commander's ability to react rapidly to good intelligence and to fix the enemy by denying him routes of escape and withdrawal.

2. (CMHA) EXAMPLE NO. 1:

a. Situation: Based on general intelligence of a VC battalion operating in Dinh Tuong and Go Cong Provinces and a report on 10 December 65 of three VC companies in western Go Cong Province, tactical air sorties were directed into this area, resulting in heavy ground fire being drawn by the aircraft. With this information the 7th Division (ARVN) planned Operation TIEN GIANG 53/65, establishing an LD time of 0900 hours on 11 December. The area of operations is shown in Sketch No. 1.

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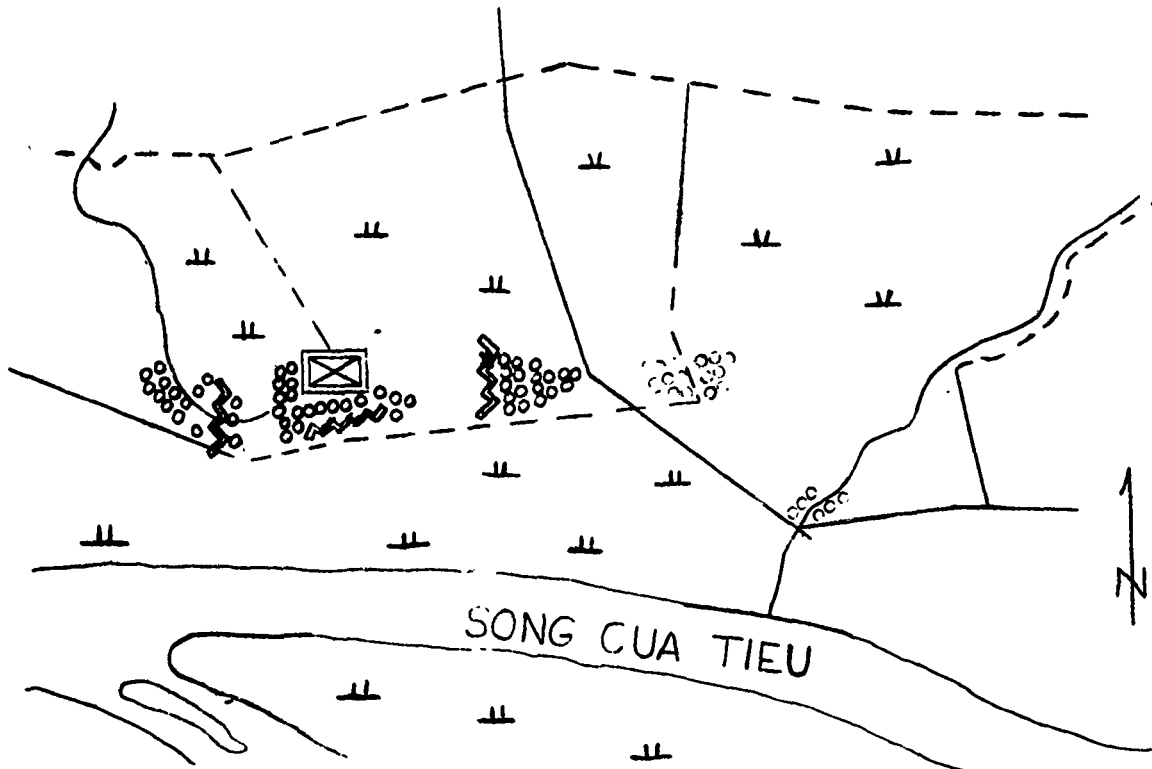
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Forces available to the 7th (ARVN) Division Commander at this time were six infantry battalions, two RF battalions, two Ranger battalions, one reconnaissance battalion, two APC troops and one 105mm artillery battalion. Additional support consisted of two River Assault Groups (RAG), one helicopter battalion with airlift, gunship and MEDEVAC capabilities, and tactical air support from 2d Air Division.

b. Concept of the Operation: Planned on the evening of 10 December, the scheme of maneuver called for simultaneous assaults by three infantry battalions, the RF and recon battalions and an APC troop from the north, and three infantry battalions and an APC troop, landed by the river assault groups from the south, with the objective of converging upon, surrounding, and destroying the VC force (Sketch No. 2).

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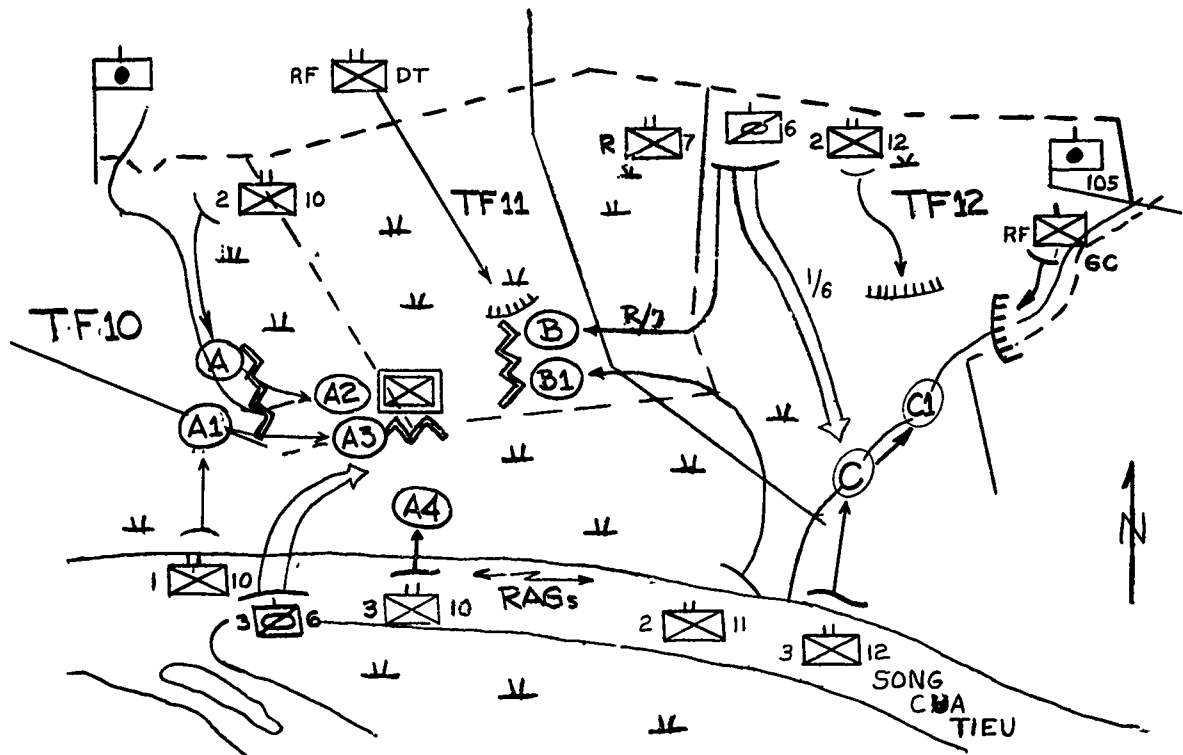
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The two Ranger Battalions were to be held in division reserve.



c. Execution: Organized into three task forces, all divisional assault elements crossed their respective LDs at 110900, to include two amphibious assaults supported by the River Assault Groups. Task Forces 10 and 11 covered on the suspected VC position while TF 12 secured the area to the east. At 1010 hours a battalion of TF 10 made the initial contact in the vicinity of Objective A1 (Sketch No. 2) and artillery fire was immediately opened. As the action developed, movement continued in conjunction with armed helicopter, artillery and close air support, towards Objectives A2 and A3 from which large caliber fire was being received. To the south, the assault units also became heavily engaged, as were

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the RAGs, and an additional battalion was landed to assist in the action. Attacks on the objective area continued until 2245 hours at which time the units ceased offensive operations, held their positions and effected resupply and evacuation until 1200 hours, 12 December. From 1200 to 1700 hours the area was searched and movement to home stations begun.

d. Results:

(1) Friendly : 15 KIA, 63 WIA, two MIA.

(2) Enemy: 181 KIA (BC), 10 VC captured, 32 weapons, one radio, one telephone and miscellaneous ammunition stocks captured (total includes one 75mm RR).

3. (CMHA) EXAMPLE NO. 2:

a. Situation: On 18 November 1965, the District Chief, Cau Ke District, Vinh Binh Province, was informed of the presence of 20 VC in prepared defensive positions approximately four Km southwest of Cau Ke District Town. Available friendly forces consisted of one RF company, one RF and one PF platoon and one platoon of 4.2 inch mortars.

b. Concept of the operation (see Sketch No. 3): A search and destroy operation was to be launched early on 19 November with the RF elements moving at first light, one platoon on the right moving across the rice fields and one company on the left through the woods, to assault the enemy position. The PF platoon was to move one hour prior to first light through the woods to establish a blocking position in the enemy rear. Mortar concentrations were planned in the wooded area along the east bank of the Bassac River to close that avenue of enemy escape.

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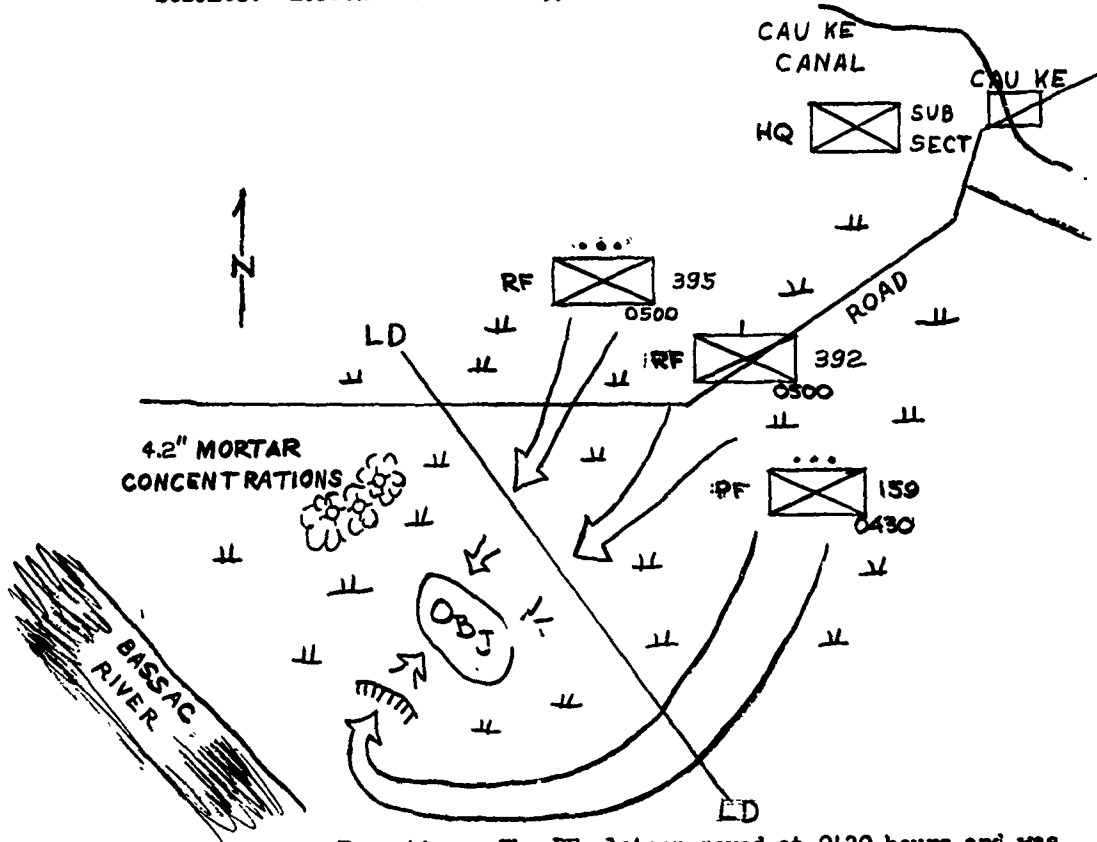
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c. Execution: The PF platoon moved at 0430 hours and was unopposed during its wide movement to establish the blocking position. At 0545 hours the RF company and platoon, after final coordination had been effected, crossed the LD abreast with the RF platoon in open ground receiving heavy small arms fire after advancing about 500 meters. Unable to maneuver, the platoon developed the situation by returning the fire. In the meantime, the RF company continued its attack through the woods area, encountering heavy resistance on the left half of the objective to include footmines, punji-pits and well prepared defensive positions. The VC then began a delaying action, whereupon the RF platoon on the right axis was able to resume its forward movement. At this time the PF platoon was ordered to move from its blocking position to assist in assaulting and clearing the objective. After the main objective area was cleared, small unit sweeps were made into the rice fields to the west of the objective area in conjunction with the firing of the preplanned 4.2 inch mortar concentrations.

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d. Results:

(1) Friendly: 2 KIA, 1 WIA.

(2) Enemy: 29 KIA, 10 VCS, 13 weapons and several documents captured.

e. Psywar exploitation: Within two hours of the conclusion of this operation, a mimeographed news bulletin publicizing the VC defeat was being circulated throughout the district.

4. (CMHA) EXAMPLE NO. 3:

a. Situation: At 1300 hours, information was received fixing the location of a Viet Cong battalion in a divisional sector. The division headquarters immediately initiated planning for a combined ground maneuver and airmobile assault to eliminate this force. Forces available for the operation were one infantry regiment (2 bns), one battalion each of two other regiments, one reconnaissance and one M113 troop. In division reserve were one infantry and two ranger battalions. Tactical air, Army aviation (helicopters) and 155mm artillery support were also available.

b. Concept of the operation: The operation called for movement on the following day by the M113 troop and reconnaissance company south along axis 1, movement by one battalion northward along axis 2 and an airmobile assault into the objective area by three battalions (see Sketch No. 4). Artillery support was available from two 155mm platoons located to the north and south.

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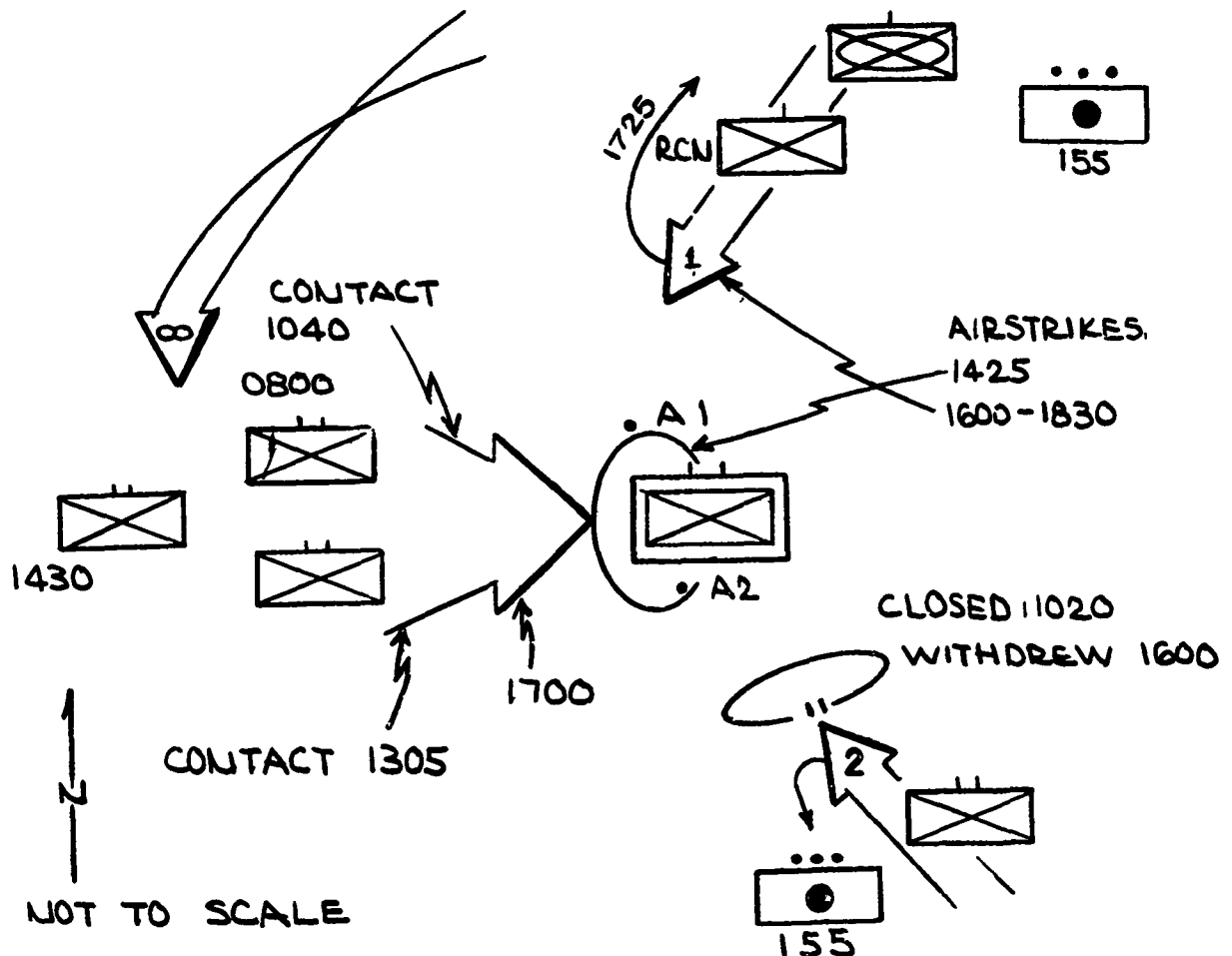
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SKETCH NO 4



(1) The ground maneuver began in the morning as planned, with the M113 troop and recon company moving south and one infantry battalion moving northward as shown on the sketch. Neither of the two forces experienced significant contact during the day and due to difficulties in negotiating the terrain the M113 troop was ordered to return to its base. The southern battalion, after occupying its blocking position (see Sketch) for some 5 hours, on division order commenced its return to base at 1600 hours.

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(2) Meanwhile, based on target response to armed helicopter reconnaissance, one infantry battalion airlifted into an LZ some 1000 meters west of check points A1 and A2 (Sketch) at 0900 hours with a second following shortly thereafter into an LZ just to the south. Due to weather restrictions, landing of the third battalion was delayed until approximately 1430 hours.

(3) At 1400 hours the initial airlanded battalion experienced light contact during which time the lift of the second battalion was still in progress. At 1305 this battalion also experience light contact and by 1700 hours all units had entered the major canal line between check points A1 and A2. No resistance was encountered and the forces organized defensive positions, remaining in the area overnight.

(4) During the afternoon's action one airstrike was employed in the A1-A2 area and a number of strikes were conducted in the area to the northeast of A1, resulting in destruction of several bunkers. A search of the area on the next day indicated a mass, uncontrolled withdrawal of VC forces as evidenced by the finding of complete briefcases of documents, weapons, medical supplies, gas masks and mortar ammunition.

d. Results:

(1) Friendly: 8 KIA, 43 WIA.

(2) Enemy: 73 KIA/KBA, 10 VCC.

5. (CMHA) DISCUSSION:

a. The three examples above are representative of offensive actions mounted by forces throughout RVN, two by divisional headquarters and one by a sub-sector headquarters. Two of these actions (Examples 1 and 2) may be considered successful, with the final criterion of success being the destruction of the VC force by decisive ground action coupled with the use of all available supporting arms. Example 3, although an action which resulted in the death of 73 VC, did not achieve the success desired and was essentially inconclusive, with the remaining VC force "fading away" into the bush.

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b. In analyzing these actions it becomes apparent that to destroy a VC unit we must decisively engage him and to decisively engage him we must both fix him and deny him withdrawal routes by which he can disengage and withdraw at a time of his choosing. Examples 1 and 2 illustrate planning and execution by divisional and small units which effectively denied to the VC a route of withdrawal, allowing combat elements to close and, using available supporting arms, to destroy his force. While the forces to physically surround him may not be available, other means may be used as illustrated by the use of 4.2 inch mortar fires in the Cau Ke action. Additional means are also apparent, such as reconnaissance elements, artillery, armed helicopters and close air support. Of particular note in Examples 1 and 2 is the use of all available ground forces, be they battalions or platoons, to FIX and FIGHT the enemy. In Example 3, withdrawal of the M13 troop and southern infantry battalion left the air landed elements to conduct a frontal assault against an enemy which, in spite of air strikes on his position, could and did withdraw successfully in the face of a superior force.

c. In all of the above examples, intelligence of enemy locations and forces was relatively good, allowing the formulation of an effective plan which if executed rapidly would give an excellent chance of success. The element of surprise was a significant factor. The action of the 7th Division was planned during the evening of 10 December and executed on the morning of 11 December; that of the Cau Ke District was planned after receipt of intelligence information on 18 December and executed early on 19 December. This swift and effective reaction to intelligence is a key factor in the decisive engagement of VC forces.

6. (CMHA) LESSONS LEARNED: The lessons learned illustrated by these examples are summarized by the following:

a. "From time to time reliable intelligence becomes available regarding the size and location of a VC force. In these instances, an aggressive operation should be mounted using clearly superior forces, firepower and mobility. Whenever possible the VC should be attacked by a combination of mobile and blocking forces while scout or reconnaissance elements cover all routes of escape or withdrawal." (MACV Directive 525-4, para 3b (1)).

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b. "Schemes of maneuver must be inherently flexible to enable immediate response to any opportunity which promises defeat and destruction of VC. Rigidly pre-planned schemes of maneuver, with successive objectives, by a force moving in one direction, will nearly always fail to fix the enemy unless the "fix" is at a place and time chosen by the VC". (Handbook for US Forces in Vietnam, Sec VIII, para 3lc.)

c. "The first step in destroying VC or NVN main force units is to entrap or encircle the enemy force. It is not sufficient, in most cases, to use only an attacking and blocking force -- more is required. The VC have, on many occasions, slipped between these two forces, escaping relatively unscathed. Therefore, the VC forces most likely routes of withdrawal must be covered by ground combat elements and the less likely routes of withdrawal by light reconnaissance elements on the ground, placed and extracted by helicopters, if available, in order to exploit time and space advantages. (Handbook for US Forces in Vietnam, Sec VII, para 3ld.)

d. Rapid reaction to good intelligence is a must. Lost opportunities do not win wars.

e. The "battle of annihilation" can be achieved.

FOR THE COMMANDER:


HOWARD D. SCHULZE
Major, AGC
Asst AG

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HEADQUARTERS
1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMOBILE)
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL
APO (AS FORCES) 96490

AVCCG

11 March 1966

TO: All Members of the 1st Air Cavalry Division

I wanted to talk to each battalion size unit between the close of operation Masher/White Wing and our next operation. But time does not permit this and so instead, I take this method to say what I would have said to you personally.

As each of us is doing his particular job in the division it is difficult, if not impossible, to form a clear picture of what the division as a whole is doing. Therefore, I will cite a few highlights of our recent forty-one days of combat in operations Masher and White Wing, which I like to call our Fong Son Campaign.

I will not attempt to recount the specific dates and places fought in by our troops, companies, and batteries, or even our squadrons, battalions, and brigades. Such an account would fill a large book. What I will give you is a brief picture of the doings of our entire team, "The First Team".

We began with operations south of Dong-Son on 25 January to increase the security of Route 1 and to confuse the enemy as to which way we were headed. Then on 28 January, D-Day for operation Masher, we joined with the ARVN Airborne Division in air assaults and overland attacks north of Dong Son. The ARVN were on the east along the coast and we operated west of Route 1 to include the high ground between the coastal plain and the An Lao Valley.

In these attacks we were successful in spite of bad weather in finding, fixing and destroying enemy units as large as battalions who were defending strongly fortified positions. In one attack the ARVN provided Armored Personnel Carriers for a coordinated attack with our 2nd Cav. Our engineers also built a fine air strip at position "Dog" in 2 1/2 days. When the enemy saw he could not hold the fortified areas he began to break up into very small groups and to retreat to the north and to the west. We attempted to cut off his retreat by landing in blocking positions along expected routes of his withdrawal. We were successful in killing or capturing some small enemy elements, but soon found most of his forces had gotten out of the coastal plain.

We then turned our attention to the high ground lying between the coastal plain and the An Lao Valley, and to the An Lao Valley itself. The next play involved a combined operation with the U. S. Marines blocking

Incl 2

enemy escape routes out of the Valley to the north and the ARVN 22nd Division blocking escape routes to the south. We were to attack with five battalions under the 2nd and 3rd Brigades on 4 February. Bad weather caused us to wait until 6 February, at which time the Marines landed a battalion by helicopter in the northern end of An Lao Valley and we landed three battalions by air assault on the high ground west of the valley, and attacked cross country into the An Lao Valley from the high grounds east of the valley with two other battalions. Our artillery, from positions in the high ground east of the valley, as well as from positions in the coastal plain, supported our own units and also the Marines and the ARVN. This assault into the An Lao Valley on 6 February started the White Wing phase of our Bong Son Campaign.

Our attack into the An Lao Valley met only light resistance and we killed or drove out the enemy that was present in a few days. We simultaneously informed the people living in the valley that we would not be rewinning and offered them a chance to leave the valley if they chose to do so. About 4,500 out of a total population of around 8,000 inhabitants did elect to leave their homes in the valley and move to an area under government control. We flew over 3,300 of these people to freedom in our aircraft. Our 2nd Brigade protected this exodus while continuing to clear the enemy from the An Lao Valley and the high ground to the east. In the process they killed and captured a number of enemy and also found a sizeable supply of 105 mm ammunition, much rice, and a big stock of salt in hidden VC caches.

While our 2nd Brigade was thus engaged, our 3rd Brigade made an air assault into an enemy base area at which we had long wanted a crack. This was the area we had dubbed the "Eagle's Claw" or "Crow's Foot" - a series of valleys southwest of Bong Son that branch out from the Son Long river valley much like the toes on the foot of a crow. Into this enemy stronghold the 3rd Brigade air assaulted and seized the foot of the crow (position "Bird"), while simultaneously landing blocking forces out at the ends of the "toes" to prevent escape from the valleys. With this strategy they were very successful in killing and capturing many enemy and much equipment, including such communications gear. They also succeeded in keeping the enemy pretty well bottled up in the overall area of the Crow's Foot until the 2nd Brigade landed on the ridges in the high ground southeast of the Crow's Foot where our intelligence indicated the enemy was hiding in strength and possibly had a major headquarters.

The 2nd Brigade found the hidden enemy on position "Pete" and in the "Iron Triangle" and gave him a sound beating in areas into which he did not believe we could or would come after him. In this fight the 2nd Brigade employed all their organic weapons plus much supporting artillery, tac air, tear gas and a B-52 strike. These actions of the 2nd Brigade accounted for many enemy killed, wounded, and captured, plus many large weapons captured or destroyed. In addition, there is much evidence that the enemy installations did include a VC regimental headquarters. If so, it will be some time before that headquarters can function as such.

As this fight was going on, our 1st Brigade relieved the 3rd Brigade which returned to An Khe to secure our division base. The 1st Brigade then began a series of assaults and sweeps through the high ground around the Crow's Foot and then moved into the high ground along the eastern and south-

eastern sides of the Son Long Valley. Here they encountered various elements of the 18th NVA Regiment including the regimental headquarters and its heavy weapons companies. The 1st Brigade took a heavy toll of these units and captured many crew served weapons, much communications gear, and a hospital with its medical supplies.

The 1st Brigade was joined by the 2nd Brigade, which made a series of air assaults and sweeps out from its position "Pony" in the eastern end of the Son Long Valley during which it destroyed many enemy in small unit engagements. Throughout the action of the 1st and 2nd Brigades, our eyes and ears, the 4/9 Cavalry Squadron, was ranging along the perimeter of the Crow's Foot area killing or capturing enemy who tried to leave the killing zone we had established in the Crow's Foot.

This was how February ended, with the 1st Brigade Headquarters returning to An Khe, but leaving its 1/8 and 2/8 Battalions under command of the 2nd Brigade for the final operation in the Cay Giap Mountains south-east of Bong Son, between the ocean and Highway 1.

This final phase of White Wing, called Black Horse, was aimed at destroying whatever hostile forces were in this forest covered mountain stronghold. The assault was made by bombing holes in the woods that cover most of the mountain and then by rappelling and by the use of our Chinook ladders to get onto the dominant high ground to sweep down the hills. This was done simultaneously with sweeps and blocks by the ARVN 22nd Division and by battalions of the 2nd Brigade in the low ground south of the mountains. No large number of VC were killed, but many were captured and the myth of this being a strong enemy base was exploded. In this last operation as throughout the 41 days, our 3 helicopter battalions performed magnificently.

So on 6 March, our operations ended with our forces back in the area south of Bong Son where we had started 41 days before. We had made a "360 degree traverse" around Bong Son in which for 41 consecutive days we had been in contact with the enemy.

In those forty-one days we had done these things:

- a. With the ARVN, we had made it possible to return 140,000 Vietnamese to GVN control through clearing the enemy from the coastal plain north of Bong Son. There is much evidence that the GVN intends to reestablish civil government in this area.
- b. We gave the inhabitants of the An Lao and Son Long Valleys a chance to be freed of VC domination by moving to areas which are under government control. About half the people given this chance did leave their homes and moved to areas controlled by the GVN.
- c. We struck a very hard blow at enemy units which had long threatened Bong Son and Route 1 from Qui Nhon to Bong Son. We fought all three regiments of the enemy Sao Vang Division (The Quyet Chien, the Quyet Thang and the Quyet Tan regiments). In this fighting we have conclusive evidence that we rendered five of the nine battalions of their three regiments ineffective, and additionally, rendered ineffective the mortar company and recoilless rifle company of the Quyet Thang Regiment, and the anti-aircraft company and signal company of the Sao Vang Division. We also captured three field hospitals supporting this division. In this fighting we achieved these specific results:

Enemy Killed (Body count) - - - - 1,342
 Enemy Killed (estimated; in. - - - 1,746
 addition to
 body count)
 Enemy wounded (estimated) - - - - 3,088
 Enemy captured (including a Battalion - - - 593
 commander, a mortar
 company commander,
 and the executive officer of
 a regimental headquarters
 company)
 Enemy suspects detained - - - - 1,060
 Chieu Hoi (VC cadres etc., who 483
 rallied to GVN)
 Individual weapons captured - - - 203
 Crew served weapons captured - - - 52
 (including one 105 howitzer, ten
 12.7 and three 50 cal AA machine guns)
 Much ammunition of all types (including 126 rounds of 105 mm
 howitzer)
 Many documents captured - - - - 1,250 pounds of which
 150 pounds promise useful
 intelligence
 Much communications equipment - (Chicom FM Transceivers, PRC 10,
 ANGR 9, Field Telephones, wire, radio parts, a P.A. system, etc.)
 captured.
 Rice captured and evacuated - - - 91 tons
 for refugees
 Salt Captured and evacuated - - - 14 tons
 for refugees
 Much individual equipment (hundreds of packs, etc.) captured.

d. As a result of this severe damage done to their units, the Sao Vang Division can be expected to be ineffective for a period of several months.

e. We obtained much tactical intelligence useful to ourselves and provided the basis for higher headquarters to glean much technical and strategic intelligence. The tactical intelligence we obtained enabled us to orient on the enemy and to maintain contact every day for forty-one consecutive days. Such prolonged contact was heretofore virtually unheard of in this type war.

f. We again demonstrated an ability to air assault into even the most difficult of terrain. Using this capability, we surprised the enemy by landing above and behind his hillside defenses and surprised him also by entering areas where he felt himself protected by his fortifications and the ruggedness of the terrain.

g. We again emplaced our artillery (and the 155 mm howitzer for the first time) on hilltops and other unlikely spots and made tube artillery support constantly available to our infantry and cavalry units.

h. Our engineers built two fine airfields, one north of Bong Son, one west of Phu Cat.

i. We conducted continuous psychological operations which produced prisoners and Chieu Hoi and also kept the inhabitants of the areas informed as to what was happening and what they should do to avoid harm and to return to government control.

j. We fought in a densely populated area, strongly defended by the VC, and yet did remarkably little damage to the friendly or potentially friendly inhabitants of the area. This is a great tribute to the careful way in which commanders at all levels explained and enforced the rules of engagement and a tribute to the individual trooper in carrying out these difficult instructions.


k. We cooperated and coordinated well with the ROK's, the ARVN and the U.S. Navy, U.S. Marines and the U.S. Air Force in prolonged and complex operations. This will enhance the confidence and mutual respect of each of these forces for the other.

l. We kept at least four of our infantry battalions (and six for the majority of the period) in sustained operations for forty-one days at an average distance from our base in An Khe of approximately 65 kilometers. We thus laid to rest any residual doubt about our ability to conduct sustained combat.

m. We transferred battalions and switched brigades with far less loss of momentum than heretofore, and were thus able to keep constant pressure on the enemy.

n. As individuals and as units you performed like true professionals. Your teamwork within and between units was top notch. The newly arrived members of the division acquitted themselves very well, our old timers were superb. I rate the division's overall performance as being at least 50% better than in our other long campaign in Pleiku - and we emerged from these forty-one days of sustained combat in far better shape than we ended our thirty-eight days combat in Pleiku.

In short, Sky Troopers of the First Air Cav, you have placed the name and the fighting reputation of the "First Team" at the very top of the roll of Army Divisions. You have again given the Army and our Country cause to be proud of you. Well done; I salute you.


HARRY W. J. KINNARD
Major General, USA
Commanding